

**Liaison Unit for NGOs in Seychelles
General Assembly**

**Chairperson's Report
2000-2003
Beginning the Second Decade of LUNGOS**

The structure of this report is as follows. It begins with the background of and introduction to LUNGOS. The main issues concerning LUNGOS, as well as some of the more important ones for the membership, in the last three years are highlighted. Some recommendations for the future are provided under some of the salient sub-headings. The report concludes with a summing up. The financial report is addressed separately.

Background

The Liaison Unit for NGOs in Seychelles (LUNGOS) was set up in 1989 to coordinate activities of NGOs in Seychelles. In 1999 it celebrated its First Decade. The Purpose of LUNGOS is:

- To promote, encourage and coordinate relief, welfare and development activities of all NGOs in Seychelles without prejudice to the autonomy of the individual members of LUNGOS.

Further LUNGOS shall serve:

- At national level: provide a common meeting ground through its commissions, for collective action by member NGOs. Build an environment supportive of the long-term future of the NGO sector. Maintain cooperation with government and where necessary set up collaborative mechanisms for government/NGO partnership.
- Beyond National borders: develop, maintain and promote co-operation and networking systems with UN agencies, Commonwealth Liaison Units, regional and international organizations, funders, as well as NGOs of similar interests.

Furthermore in pursuit of the purpose and objectives of LUNGOS we will increase work through programs and services:

- Training, education and human resource development.
- Information services.
- Networking
- Services Programs

Introduction

The last General Assembly of LUNGOS was held on 13th May 2000 where a new Board was elected. The Board consists of the following elected members: Dr. Nirmal Jivan Shah, Chairperson, Mrs. Florence Benstrong, Mr. Terence Vel and Ms. Michelle Harter. Unfortunately, Ms. Harter had to leave the country soon after. The following were nominated by their respective Commissions to sit on the Board, Mrs. Marie Nella Azemia, (Seychelles Peace and Friendship Commission), Mrs. Peggy Vidot (Seychelles Health and Social Welfare Commission), Mrs. Raymonde Onezime (Women's Commission), Mr. Mathew Servina (Socio-Economic Commission), Mrs. Dora Ernesta (Children and Youth Commission)

The new Board took over LUNGOS at a time when this organization started its Second Decade of existence.

Board

Soon after taking office the Board started to meet every two months. Two persons of high standing were co-opted to assist the Board. Mrs. Rose Mary Elizabeth Executive Director, Alliance of Solidarity for the Family (ASFF) because it was thought necessary to fill the skills gap left by Ms. Harter, and Mr. Antonio Lucas of SACOS who was brought on board to assist with financial and institutional matters. The Board also appointed Mr. Bernadin Renaud an honorary member (Honorary Chair) and he also agreed to act as honorary Treasurer.

An exercise run by Mr. Lucas produced documents on the role of the Board and the Executive Secretary to streamline operations of both. After the departure of the Executive Secretary in 2001 (see below), Board meetings became more frequent. Board members in this case have, unusually so, taken on executive roles to try to alleviate the lack of permanent staff. In general a core group of about 8 members have regularly met and remained actively engaged despite full time jobs and very busy schedules. Many Board members feel that they would like to continue the initial foundation work they have started, to consolidate gains and to bridge emerging gaps.

It is clear that LUNGOS will always need permanent staff who can implement the directives of the Board; an honorary Board, presumably made up of active and prominent members of society, will have difficulty in executing actions itself.

Secretariat

With a clear mandate from the members at the last elections, the new Board provided more direction on a regular basis to the Secretariat. This proved very effective as LUNGOS activities were scaled up. However, in 2001 the Executive Secretary hastily left on study leave overseas for a year. It proved very difficult to run the office and meet members' needs solely with volunteers. The Board struggled to resolve the issue. The Board eventually agreed to recruit an administrative officer. Advertisements were placed twice to recruit the administrative officer. The first successful candidate fell ill and could not take up the post. On the second occasion the preferred candidate was not released from her position by her employer. Board members, all of whom wear many hats, resolutely attempted to take over various sections of work. Two trainees under the URS scheme left. They were having difficulty in working independently without permanent senior staff but in any case the URS informed LUNGOS it could not continue with the program.

The Board negotiated a pledge from Government for assistance and two young trainees began work in 2002. Upon her return to Seychelles, the Executive Secretary decided not to take up her position at the end of 2002. The Board was then able to recruit a new candidate. Mrs. Marie France Howard is now in post. The Secretariat has now revised opening hours: 9-5 Monday to Friday and 9-12 Saturday to accommodate members.

The period without an Executive Secretary proved to be a very difficult one for LUNGOS. It was virtually impossible for the Board to anticipate the departure of the Executive Secretary, to rationally plan for handover or to put in place a bridging mechanism. In the interim, members could not be serviced properly. The task of making up for lost time on some key issues becomes very urgent. The Board has full confidence in Mrs. Howard, a mature Seychelloise who is a qualified nurse and a highly dedicated person, with over 20 years of experience in working with housing societies, NGOs and disadvantaged peoples in the UK.

Membership

On average LUNGOS has managed to attract 3 new members a year. LUNGOS was involved in the launching of several NGOs. Some new NGOs are awaiting their successful application for membership in 2003. A committee to assess proposed new members was set up.

Between 2000 and the present, a few larger member NGOs mostly those with budgets from government and/or with overseas donors achieved national prominence on a regular and sustained basis. In the main however, NGOs continued to suffer from the same malaise as in previous years. The increasing economic difficulties have caused several NGOs to come to a standstill as well as the probable extinction of a few others, despite all the best efforts of LUNGOS.

The question of outstanding dues from the previous years on electricity and rent by NGOs in the LUNGOS building were resolved, in one case by very forceful measures.

LUNGOS has attempted to find out which NGOs are currently active but it has proven difficult to get this information and thus this exercise is ongoing. Thirty-six NGOs are in good standing with LUNGOS having paid their dues regularly, which is approximately the same number at the time of the last General Assembly in 2000.

A joint exercise with the Registrar of Associations needs to be undertaken urgently to see which NGOs are no longer functioning. A membership drive needs to be undertaken, as several NGOs are not members of LUNGOS. Members need regular reminders for payment of dues. Nevertheless, service delivery to members needs improvement to meet members' expectations; a survey needs to be undertaken to understand what the expectations of members are vis-a-vis LUNGOS and to promote the understanding that LUNGOS is an umbrella organization acting as a facilitator and not necessarily as a project implementor. On the other hand the Board agrees that stronger NGOs should take a hand in assisting either LUNGOS or other smaller NGOs.

Office

The office was painted twice, most recently by 2 Board members and private sector volunteers in 2002, and curtains donated in 2001. In 2002, a major cleaning operation was undertaken by 2 Board members and approximately 80 kilos of obsolete and broken-down equipment and furniture, out-of-date publications and other solid waste were taken out from the building.

Several used computers were received since 2000 but all broke down. In 2002 a new computer and fax machine were purchased. Two new computers have been recently secured under a donor project in collaboration with SIDEC. However, owing to dust and heat as well as the real risk of burglary, the Board decided to install these later, in the offices pledged by SACOS (see below). The back of the building which was in an extremely run down condition, with trash and debris everywhere, has finally been cleaned.

The building where LUNGOS is located is due to be demolished for the new court development. The Board mandated the Chair, accompanied by the Honorary Chair, to meet with the Minister of Land Use and Habitat and other officers to re-activate the LUNGOS project for land and build an office. However, it proved very difficult to secure a plot in Victoria. The Board discussed the matter with several entities and successfully negotiated a pledge from SACOS for free office space (in the present SACOS premises) when SACOS finalizes its move to the Orion Promet building, which should be soon.

Funding

Soon after election the Chair and the Executive Secretary met with the Vice President to secure an increase in the government's allocation to LUNGOS. The government increased the budget by 25%.

Other fund raising activities by LUNGOS included sale of plants, badges and pins for special occasions, cards and other items.

The Board mandated the Chair to pursue several possible lines of donor financing, with meetings with the EU, COI, UNESCO, UNDP, etc. A UNDP capacity building project, which LUNGOS has had a part in designing, seems promising. The Chair met with a COI mission to input LUNGOS needs into a regional project and organized meetings with other relevant NGOs to do the same. The COI is proposing a regional capacity building project for NGOs and civil society concerns in Seychelles have now been integrated.

Financing under the European Union's 9th EDF to Seychelles was forcefully and successfully negotiated, the first time that civil society has managed to locate substantial funds directly from this source. A total of Euro 300,000.00 has been pledged to finance a major part of the LUNGOS approved Plan of Action dealing with capacity building. The funds are earmarked to increase the capabilities of LUNGOS over three years with equipment, a vehicle, a documentation unit and other materials necessary for key programs such as gender empowerment, institutional building for NGOs and national volunteering, as well as staff to undertake fund raising and project development. It is believed that for the first time in its history, LUNGOS will be able to realize its full potential in the next three years and reach a comfortable position where it can assist members in a concrete fashion.

It must be acknowledged that lack of resources and a very difficult enabling environment hamper NGO development and evolution. The difficulties that LUNGOS have mirror in some ways the difficulties of civil society in general.

Commissions

LUNGOS set up Commissions to bring together like-minded NGOs to present a common voice and programs. There are Five Commissions that have been set up with several others planned. They are Peace and Friendship Commission, Health and Social Welfare Commission, Women's Commission, Socio-Economic Commission and Children and Youth Commission. Three Commissions remained relatively active in this period: Peace and Friendship Commission, Women's Commission and the Socio-Economic Commission. They held general meetings and fielded representatives to local and international meetings. The Board discussed the future of Commissions and the need to have more supra-bodies operating in an environment which is already full of committees and with very limited availability of resources. It was suggested that a consultancy study be initiated to assess the value and effectiveness of the Commissions as well as the functioning of LUNGOS itself. Funds however could not be located for this study although the Commonwealth and others were contacted.

As a high priority, it is necessary to convene a meeting or workshop with all Commissions and agree on a strategy regarding Commissions. In particular, the effectiveness and necessity of Commissions and their role vis-a vis LUNGOS should result from this.

Communication and Information Clearing

With the message from the last General Assembly to improve communication, the Secretariat was given the mandate by the Board to augment communication with members. An Information newsletter was published but due to lack of input from members it became difficult to collate and

compile news and information. The newsletter ceased altogether when the photocopier broke down and the budget could not support copying for all members.

Between 2000 to 2003, the Chair was invited to open some 45 NGO workshops and meetings. The secretariat circulated newsletters, invitations to meetings and relevant topical items on a regular basis to members. With a new computer in 2002, electronic information is forwarded regularly to interested members.

The post office box and fax of LUNGOS continues to be used by several NGOs. Internet access is used by the secretariat and a few Board members only owing to the high cost. It does seem that the LUNGOS meeting room continues to be well used, on average 25 times a year and by about 19 different NGOs.

Some members have produced brochures, several have newsletters and one NGO publishes a color magazine. A study undertaken by LUNGOS in 2002 found that NGOs were mentioned on average once a week in the newspaper; one NGO appeared on average every month. NGO representatives regularly appear on radio and television news and one NGO appears on two regular radio programs and writes a newspaper column. NGOs have organized public rallies and marches to highlight burning issues such as HIV/AIDS. A survey undertaken by LUNGOS in 2002 found that five members had web sites.

The lack of resources to produce and distribute publications on a regular basis currently hamper communication with and between members; printing costs have risen two fold over the last three years. An electronic Information Clearing House is therefore preferable. Most overseas organizations with mandates similar to LUNGOS use this system as a primary source of support to members. Nevertheless, many LUNGOS members are only rudimentarily acquainted with the Internet. A survey undertaken by LUNGOS in 2002 found that many NGOs do not have their own email addresses; this limits the possibly of electronic newsletters, email discussion groups, forwarding of useful web sites and donor information, and distribution of documents in PDF or other format. The LUNGOS Directory is currently outdated and a new edition needs to be published; again this would benefit from being electronically accessed (and updated).

Relations with Government and other sectors

At the previous General Assembly, it was noted that NGOs were experiencing difficulties with government agencies: it was minuted that “with some Ministries the doors are still firmly shut”. Various meetings were held with Government on this subject. An NGO/Government Workshop was planned to move the relationship to a new level. LUNGOS and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Manpower Development jointly planned the workshop. The aim was to strengthen NGO/Government partnership for sustainable national development. The workshop was held between 6th and 7th August at the International Conference Centre. The Commonwealth Foundation and Government sponsored it. Interest was high and a total of 84 participants from both Government and civil society attended. The outputs and participation were judged excellent. A comprehensive report was produced and circulated to Government and the Commonwealth and is available for perusal by members. An MOU between GoS and LUNGOS was the key recommendation. Various recommendations such as joint planning groups and more representations on committees have been implemented. Owing to reshuffling in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Manpower Development and the lack of staff at LUNGOS, it has proven difficult to implement a second workshop as planned.

Informal links were forged with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Chair and other members of the Board have had the opportunity to build closer ties with the Chamber's Secretary General and Councilors because of joint representation on national committees.

Good bridges have been built. It is necessary that a second NGO/Government workshop is planned as recommended and concrete measures as recommended in the report, if still relevant, be implemented. There may be new opportunities now, especially because of the Macro-economic Reform Plan, for enhanced NGO/Government cooperation. Future workshop(s) should take the new economic dimension as a primary point of departure.

Representation on national bodies.

The Board was determined to rectify the situation apparent from previous years where the last General Assembly reported on the unwillingness of some government ministries to accommodate NGOs on committees. LUNGOS is now represented on over 35 committees including key ones such as the National AIDS Council, the National Youth Council, the National Environment Advisory Council, the Small Island Voice, Education for All, and the Environment Management Plan Steering Committee. LUNGOS now has difficulty in locating NGO members for representation on the increasing number of committees it is being invited to sit on.

It is vital that a review is undertaken of all the committees to evaluate their effectiveness and value vis-a-vis NGOs.

National Workshops and Events.

LUNGOS representatives attended over 50 workshops in this period.

Various events that LUNGOS coordinated in this period included exhibitions on violence against women, HIV/AIDS, healthy parenting and reproductive health. A project sponsored by UNIFEM enabled LUNGOS and ASFF to print posters stickers and distribute them.

For two years running LUNGOS coordinated an NGO Week with an Exhibition depicting NGO activities, and a Fair as well as individual activities by members.

LUNGOS coordinated various activities to commemorate the International Year of the Volunteer. A national Volunteer Committee was set up and a workshop held. The launch of this important event nationally took place at the LUNGOS building in 2001 by the Minister for Social Affairs and Manpower Development, Mr. William Herminie.

LUNGOS was involved in the drawing up of various national documents including the Plan of Action for HIV/Aids, the Plan of Action for Promotion of Reproductive Health, the Social Development workshop report and the National Youth Council plan of action. Work on other ongoing strategies and plans continue.

International committees, conventions and organizations.

Cooperation continued with many regional and international entities. LUNGOS organized representation, by Board members or NGO members, at over 20 regional and international meetings in this period. These included important meetings organized by SDAC, the Commonwealth and others.

Owing to foreign currency constraints LUNGOS had to review and revise its membership to international organisations. Most memberships were put on hold for future revision.

Cooperation continued with regional NGOs such as the FCOI. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between LUNGOS and MACOSS from Mauritius, thus laying a formal base for cooperation between the civil society of the two countries.

LUNGOS was the only entity in the country to organize stakeholder feedback as well as a national meeting in 2002 in preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in South Africa, the largest global summit ever held. The Chair was contacted by a funding body from overseas to lead a 10 person-strong delegation to the Summit. The Board chose the delegation according to criteria laid down by the funders and LUNGOS internal procedures. Despite major disappointments at the Summit not only from the Seychelles NGOs but from most of civil society organizations throughout the world as regards donor funding, individual members of the delegation were exposed for the first time to an event of such magnitude. The experience gained and linkages achieved have been invaluable.

LUNGOS members assisted in the organization of the FCOI meeting held recently. LUNGOS is a founding member of the FCOI that has now changed its status from a foundation to a federation.

The Board has secured a place for two LUNGOS representatives on the Government committee now planning for the Barbados + 10 meeting to be held in Mauritius next year. The Chair has made contact with UNEP to start negotiations for NGO representation at this very important Small Island Developing States (SIDS) meeting

An evaluation needs to be undertaken on representation on international meetings and a new protocol agreed for feedback to members.

Conclusion

The first three years of the Second Decade of LUNGOS have proven to be rewarding as well as challenging. Several key steps have been achieved but we faltered when a missing link appeared with the departure of the Executive Secretary. The Board, being made up of honorary members, had difficulty in taking up executive roles, especially when most members had full time jobs as well as being active in NGO and community work of their own.

This Board has left a solid legacy for LUNGOS. It successfully negotiated an increase in the LUNGOS budget. It has secured a Euro 300,000.00 funding package under the 9th EDF (EU) which will enable the association, for the first time, to undertake its work with adequate financing, equipment and staffing. It has secured a pledge for modern office space free of charge in the Pirates Arms building in the present SACOS offices. It now owns modern computer facilities which enable Internet access and importantly, easy and rapid communication with members through email. Equipment such as a vehicle, photocopier and other computers are scheduled to be acquired under the EDF grant. An Executive Secretary with substantial civil society experience gained overseas has been recruited. Through various meetings and a massive undertaking, the NGO-Government Workshop, the ice has been broken with many Government organizations, comprehension about the nature of NGOs increased, and cooperation in several fields initiated or enhanced. The reach of LUNGOS is now wider with more representation on important national committees. It has helped several new NGOs to be formed and has acquired new members. A major coup was achieved when LUNGOS fielded a large delegation to the WSSD and built up links with international entities; this will be followed up with work for and representation at the Barbados + 10 meeting for Small Island States.